

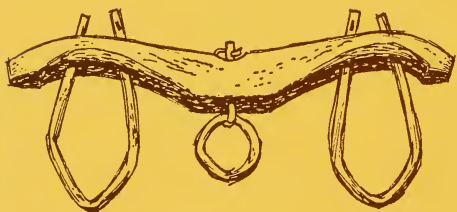
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How Abraham Lincoln immortalized the Freeport Debate

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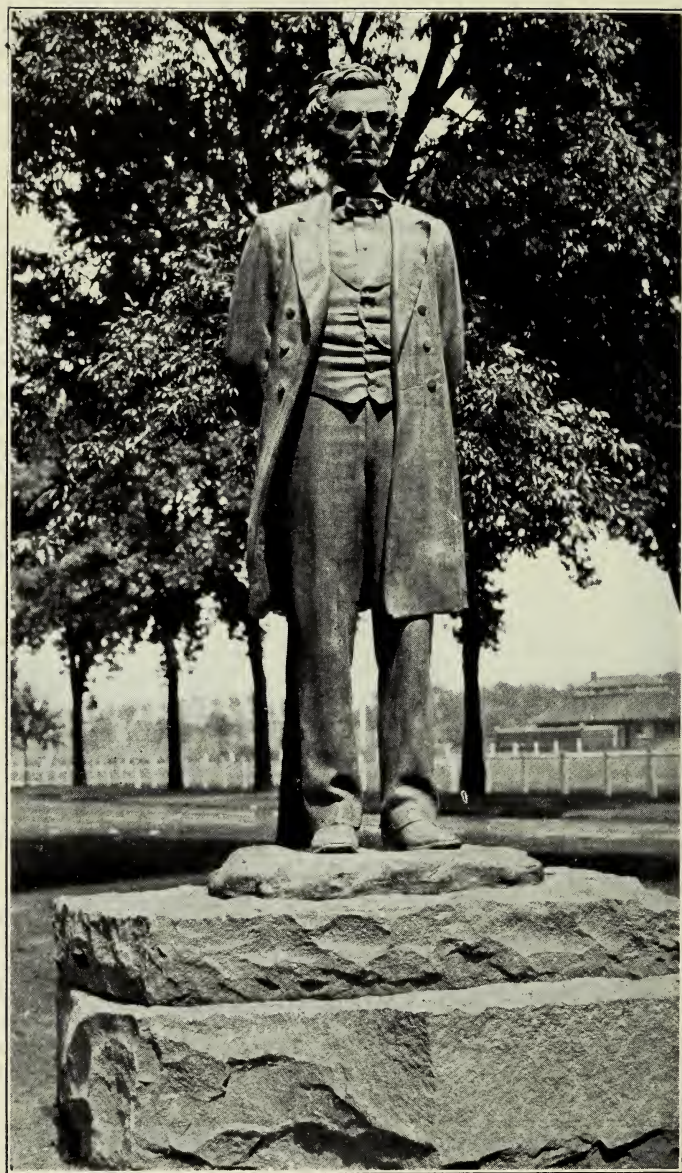
HOW ABRAHAM LINCOLN
IMMORTALIZED THE
FREEPORT DEBATE



By
EMANUEL HERTZ



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This statue, the gift of W. T. Rawleigh, was designed by Leonard Crunelle, sculptor; unveiled August 27, 1929, at Freeport, Ill.

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HOW ABRAHAM LINCOLN IMMORTALIZED THE FREEPORT DEBATE

By EMANUEL HERTZ

In the great mass of Lincoln literature which is daily coming from the presses, either in book form or magazine articles, we note a tendency of author and speaker to state with a great deal of certainty what Lincoln would have done were he here today. Especially is this the case in our national and state legislative bodies, where present day statesmen do not hesitate in the least to annex Lincoln to their chariot and announce the fact that they are not only his spokesmen, but are carrying on his unfinished work, and that if Lincoln were alive he would do and say just what they are doing and advocating. In this way Lincoln is made to sponsor plans and theories, ideas and platforms of government such as he never dreamed of. He is held up by these, his self-constituted followers, who use him to protect their theories and legislative programs as the silent sponsor of their ideas; so that criticism of them and their schemes is made to be criticism of Lincoln and his ideas of government.

The moment they are satisfied that a reform ought to be inaugurated, if it is complied with, a pious announcement follows that Lincoln, were he here, would do just that. They have taken good care to procure the scantiest information about his life and his struggles, for an intimate knowledge of

his words and deeds might silence their pretensions. They have as little knowledge of him as they have consideration for those who differ with them and who dislike their favorite schemes.

It has become the fashion, particularly at the anniversaries of Lincoln's great decisions and performances, for these spurious Lincolns to appear and impose their nostrums and propaganda upon the people who come to hear something about Lincoln—an opportunity which they would never have if they, themselves, were the announced features and attractions of these particular occasions. And so these functions, instead of affording the opportunity of spreading the simple gospel, the lucid philosophy of life of the great American, are beclouded with the passing heresies of these ephemeral messiahs and the simple minded are thus led to believe, some at least, that these men speak by the authority of Lincoln's creed and Lincoln's beliefs, or that they have something in common with Lincoln. Fortunately, it is but the uninitiated and unthinking who are thus imposed upon, but their number is great and the result is unfortunate.

To those who know Lincoln, these outpourings of these self-satisfied egotists mean absolutely nothing. Lincoln did not speak that way. They know him not. Do you ever hear any of them say: "I have not sufficiently considered the question to be able to answer at this time" as Lincoln did here seventy-one years ago? So unlike Douglas is Lincoln during the great debate, and this horde of spurious Lincolns are ever ready to answer all questions promptly the moment they have the opportunity afforded them.

But even at this late day Douglas must be segregated from

these modern pseudo Lincolns; for when Douglas at Freeport replied to Abraham Lincoln's second question he seemed to have become sobered for the moment. He saw an honest man before him who had a mission for which no sacrifice was too great. He was confronted with the embodiment of truth—truth, the seal of God. And this man spoke like the messenger of God.

Did Douglas see the 'mene mene tekel upharsun' on the wall? Did he inwardly reproach his friend (for they were friends) and neighbor, Abraham Lincoln, for extorting the reply and with it the great sacrifice as the price of the Senatorship, the most outstanding Pyrrhic victory of the first seventy-five years in American politics?

Did he, then, see that the Presidential nomination of a united democracy was lost to him forever? Did anyone at Freeport on the 27th day of August, 1858, see what was happening, as Douglas was answering the second question as a result of which a nation was then and there saved from impending disruption and destruction?

Did anyone in Freeport on August 27th, 1929, seventy-one years after—anyone of the fifteen thousand visitors—think of that? It was not even hinted at by the protagonists of the celebration, or by those who spoke by their grace. Surely, Freeport has not forgotten all else excepting only the day?

Let us try and visualize the great shaft of light which was trained upon that spot, when Lincoln struck the rock with his rod of steel and produced the sparks which electrified a nation shrouded in the clouds of uncertainty and in the night of despondency and despair. Let us hark back these seventy-one years and see him rise, and in the presence of the largest

audience assembled up to that time make his great renunciation for the time being, in order to gain the glory and opportunity of saving the nation.

It was just six days after the monster meeting at Ottawa where Douglas made his almost regal entry and opened the first debate. The Republicans were seriously considering as to whether Lincoln was the man to have been successfully pitted against Stephen A. Douglas. The debate at Ottawa concluded, and Lincoln was still among the living in spite of predictions that he could not appear at the second joint debate. And if you read the utterances in the press you almost believe it. Lincoln at Freeport was prepared to take hold of the leadership and to direct the remaining six debates as he had mapped them out from the moment the challenge was accepted. He had heard and read every important utterance by Douglas up to that moment. At Ottawa he heard Douglas' whole case restated in an hour. He never added much after that—stripped of the replies made necessary by Lincoln's argument, by Lincoln's questions, by Lincoln's replies, by Lincoln's new material, Lincoln's sustaining and defending Trumbull, Lincoln's charges of forgery of a spurious platform, Lincoln's charges of destroying the Missouri Compromise with the passage of the Douglas Kansas-Nebraska Bill, Lincoln's charging the plotting of a new additional and supplemental and enlarged Dred Scott decision, including "State" as well as territory—answering these charges kept Douglas busy for the remaining six debates and he never had the chance of launching an additional attack on Lincoln excepting only during the last closing half hour at Alton, as he undoubtedly intended to do from the beginning. For Douglas

was to be the aggressor now as he was ever accustomed to be. He knew no restraining tactics.

Let us see. Douglas opens in a grandiloquent oratorical effort of an hour—the best of all his addresses during the debates, for Lincoln sits mute and listens. He concludes with an attempt to make Lincoln dance to his music, so to say. Douglas thunders at Lincoln:

"I desire to know whether Mr. Lincoln today stands, as he did in 1854, in favor of the unconditional repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law.

"I desire him to answer whether he stands pledged today as he did in 1854 against the admission of any more Slave States into the Union, even if the people want them.

"I want to know whether he stands pledged against the admission of a new State into the Union with such a constitution as the people of that State may see fit to make.

"I want to know whether he stands today pledged to the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia.

"I desire him to answer whether he stands pledged to the prohibition of the slave trade between the different states.

"I desire to know whether he stands pledged to prohibit slavery in all the territories of the United States, North as well as South of the Missouri Compromise line.

"I desire him to answer whether he is opposed to the acquisition of any more territory unless slavery is prohibited therein.

"I ask Abraham Lincoln to answer these questions in order that when I trot him down to lower Egypt, I may put the same questions to him."

Douglas had evidently carefully thought out his method of conducting the debate. It was the same method which proved successful in the United States Senate. It was his well-known method which had served him so remarkably on the stump for nearly a quarter of a century, so why not now with Abraham Lincoln?

And thus Douglas thought he had Lincoln tied hand and foot. He thought he would keep Lincoln busy during his hour and a half answering the seven questions he had propounded, by answering and explaining or denying the charges he (Douglas) had made, both against Lincoln and Trumbull and the whole Republican Party, without giving Lincoln a chance to have his audience hear what Lincoln had to say for his candidacy. Douglas did not want Lincoln to deliver his well-prepared opening address. Another man might have fallen into the trap and so filled up his hour and a half attempting quickly to answer these questions. In the replying one-half hour of Douglas, the "little giant" would have concluded his job and would have left Lincoln sufficient material to occupy his opening at Freeport without making any progress himself, only to be again overwhelmed with Douglas' charges, criticisms and questions in his one and a half hour at Freeport, which Lincoln could not have coped with in his half hour on that day. But that was not Lincoln's method. He could not thus be swept off his moorings. Lincoln's cause was just, and so thrice armed was he when he faced Douglas at Ottawa.

What actually did happen when Lincoln heard Douglas' opening address at Ottawa was that he had fathomed his opponent's plan, completely envisaged his purposes and his

arguments, which he made and would continue to make if he, Lincoln, would permit him. Douglas never rose above his first performance, his initial speech at Ottawa, for there he spoke freely, fluently, looking down upon his victim whom he thought he could crush by his superior ability as a rough and tumble debater, as he did all in the Senate who stood in his way. And then he was still even-tempered, confident that Lincoln would not be able to develop and be at his best owing to a slower, though surer, method of reasoning which he had adopted and for which he was well known. Lincoln was never in a hurry. Douglas was accustomed to rush his opponents and storm their breastworks before they knew what he was after. A great many never had the opportunity to reply adequately to Douglas. He was through before they realized what was transpiring. He had accomplished by speed what others could not by solid argument. His very career was a marvel of speedy climbing from one to the other rung of the ladder of fame and preferment. He had literally "mounted on eagle's wings with never a let down, never a halt,"—State Attorney, member of the Illinois Legislature, Judge of the Illinois Supreme Court, Congressman and United States Senator at thirty-six—no other man excepting only Clay had ever achieved such success. Douglas alone, almost immediately after his first arrival in the Senate, rose to leadership of that body and of the Democratic Party in the nation, as no other man had before him—prominent candidate for President in 1852, almost nominated in 1856, sure of the nomination in 1860 and of election if the storm could be delayed long enough to have him receive the nomination.

And what a remarkable man he really was. He knew no fear. He defies the President and the whole Administration with the same fearlessness as he destroys the Missouri Compromise, the most hallowed bulwark of all parties up to that time. The leaders of the South follow him as they did all Southern leaders beginning with Jefferson and Madison and Jackson down to John C. Calhoun. And here he is on the final lap in a victorious march from penury to political primacy and to the Presidency, which he is sure to attain if he but wins this Senatorial election needed to insure his nomination for the Presidency two years later. No other name has appeared upon the horizon. Douglas alone holds the center of the stage. He is known throughout the land — even Greeley and Crittenden are swept into his camp. They both advocate his election to the Senate. It will be an easy matter, he thinks, to laugh this curious, if not grotesque, candidate from the boards—whether in his heart of hearts he knew better, we may only surmise. But he certainly acts in Ottawa as he opens as though nothing and no one would stand in his way—surely not Lincoln.

But what happened at Ottawa after Douglas concluded? Lincoln starts as he always does and did—calmly and quietly, somewhat nervously at first (he always needs a few moments for mental lubrication) before the mission of the hour takes complete possession of him. He talks to the audience and to the nation, as he did at Cooper Union two years later, unconcerned and unaffected by what Douglas said, unconcerned by the effort of being forced by Douglas into sidetracking his line of thought and his program for the discussion, unaffected by the attempt of Douglas to frighten him into doing as

Douglas wanted him to do and plunge into a hand-to-hand struggle with Douglas and answer his questions at once.

No, Lincoln had a plan of his own of reaching the voters of Illinois and of the nation. If Douglas had a preliminary statement or platform at Ottawa, so did Lincoln have one, and Lincoln proceeded to state it, and he had an hour and a half to Douglas' hour to do it in; and that with Lincoln's directness, with his concise habit of speech and his mastery of logic and total lack of circumlocution or repetition, and his thorough preparedness with facts and figures, with essential quotation of all relevant material which was needed for the occasion.

Douglas listened to an argument, to a platform, to a theory of government, to an analysis of the problem which agitated the whole nation such as he never listened to before. In the Senate he could heckle and confuse and cross-question and browbeat an opponent, most of them old men. Not so here. Lincoln here, like Douglas, had the exclusive right to talk, without interruption, and Douglas never experienced up to that moment, a similar hour and a half of mental shell and shot, of deadly reasoning and argument of an array of fact and a condensed arraignment of himself and of his legislative career, incidentally of the whole Democratic Party, and particularly of the Dred Scott decision, in a withering and marvelous allegorical arraignment of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, two Presidents and Douglas, and of all his finely spun purposes for the future, as he did now. Douglas was in a rage which became more uncontrollable as the speaker concluded without answering the seven questions put to him by Douglas; Lincoln has actually ignored Douglas,

and his questions and his threats. No such thing had ever happened to Douglas before.

Douglas had a half hour during which he stressed the point ad nauseam, that Lincoln dared not answer, did not answer, would not answer, could not answer the questions, but which he would force him to answer in order to show him up in order to prove that he would not answer in Ottawa or Freeport, as he would in Jonesboro and in other parts of the State. It was clearly a half hour wasted on the part of Douglas, during which he could have developed his attack in his opening speech or supplement it by additional argument, which he could not force into an hour, whereas Lincoln had an hour and a half; but no such thing happened. He fumed and he threatened, he grew furious at the charges of conspiracy contained in Lincoln's argument, and instead of getting answers to his questions he found himself repelling and explaining charges contained in Lincoln's argument at the very outset. Lincoln was careful of what he said. Hitt, the reporter, was there, and the debate would be reprinted verbatim and would be read by millions, North as well as South, and so his quotations were there, his clippings were ready, his crucial statements were printed or written out and handed to the reporters. He, Lincoln, would take no chance at being misquoted in newspapers, most of them hostile, which went out of their way to misquote and misrepresent, and which were read with almost religious zeal by friend and foe alike. And so while Douglas' performances may have been both more successful as oratorical or theatrical achievements before this comparatively small audience as compared

with a whole nation of readers, as compared with the unseen hearers throughout the land—and Douglas had a glorious voice and a splendid personality on the platform, far better in every respect than Lincoln as a rule, for Lincoln had his great moments—witness his lost speech delivered some years before—the report in cold type the next morning in 'The Chicago Tribune' was a revelation. Lincoln had scored from every standpoint. His hour and a half statement of the case, of the subject matter, could not be improved upon. It left Douglas in the air. His questions ignored, his statement shown to be impossible, his manner inferior and in sharp contrast with the dignity of Lincoln's apology for the life of the Union, his irate half hour's reply—the most perfect demonstration that he had met not only his equal but his Waterloo; if this was to be an index of Lincoln in joint debate—Douglas found at last an opponent who did not fear him, an opponent who was thoroughly acquainted with every word he said, who knew his record from a thorough study of his published speeches, and who could demolish a false argument, an inaccurate statement, detect an incomplete or inaccurate quotation, better than any other man living.

All these things Douglas probably suspected, but now he saw, as he had feared, that Lincoln was more dangerous than the entire Senate and all the Republican leaders combined. And finally, he saw that Lincoln would take no chance of either answering questions or asking them without mature consideration and without reducing such mental dynamite to writing.

Lincoln must read his answers to questions which had been printed in the press, in order to avoid inaccuracy or with-

drawal or modification of statements or charges that he was unfair or incorrect in his statement, and Lincoln would certainly not ask any question, or rather *the great* question without writing it down and reading it to his antagonist, so that his antagonist would and could not equivocate or straddle the clear-cut inquiry—the answer to which would forever put an end to his Presidential aspirations.

So Lincoln used part of the intervening six days between the meetings of Ottawa and Freeport, to prepare the answers to Douglas' seven questions and to frame his four questions; of course he, like Douglas, spent a good deal of time addressing audiences in towns along the road from Ottawa to Freeport. No battle was ever harder fought than this fight for the Senate in Illinois in 1858.

Between Ottawa and Freeport, Lincoln was most concerned with the correct report of the first debate. Hitt did his duty nobly. The debate was properly reported and Lincoln had a printed copy of the two addresses of Douglas' and of his own when they reached Freeport. It evidently never occurred to Douglas how this Ottawa speech would compare in print with that of Lincoln's first address.

At Freeport Lincoln had the opening address and spoke for an hour. Oh, what an important hour, what a *fateful hour*, both for himself and, especially, for Douglas. If Douglas dreamed that Lincoln was afraid to answer his questions, he was soon to be disillusioned. But it is hardly possible that Douglas expected Lincoln to go through the six joint debates remaining without answering the questions propounded by Douglas. If he did, he had not long to wait until Lincoln, with lawyer-like precision, drew from his papers the seven

questions asked by Douglas and as printed in the 'Chicago Tribune'—questions which had now been read by the entire country. He proceeded to answer them, at first categorically, briefly and as completely, as precisely as only Lincoln could. But he was not going to rest on a short categorical answer. He now proceeded to answer them fully and clearly so that all—not only logician and controversialist could understand, but what was of far more importance—that all the voters in the land could read and understand. It was an amazingly thorough job, a splendid demonstration of what Lincoln, at his best, was capable of performing. The questions Douglas asked were not only completely answered, honestly answered, generously amplified after the brief answers, but the questioner, Douglas, was permanently placed in second place by his neighbor and hitherto politically unsuccessful friend and antagonist.

And as though this feat alone were not sufficient, this holding at bay the man who never knew defeat, this leader—the foremost man of his time in political life—he, Lincoln, the obscure, the humble, the shy, proceeded to propound four questions. He would 'bring forward a new installment when he would get them ready'—the honest answer to one of them alone would for all time make an end of Douglas in politics, both State and National.

How little Lincoln feared Douglas can be seen from the new method which he adopted when he said that there was only one way he could account for Douglas' conduct about using spurious resolutions—never passed at Springfield or at any convention or at any public meeting at which Lincoln was present; but let Lincoln speak for himself:

"I can only account for his having done so upon the supposition that that evil genius, which has attended him through life, giving to him apparent astonishing prosperity, such as to lead many good men to doubt there being any advantage in virtue over vice, I can say I can only account for it on the supposition that the evil genius has at last made up his mind to forsake him."

This certainly does not indicate that Lincoln had the remotest fear or trepidation about the result of the debate—and its effect upon the nationwide audience. He reads the questions and answers as though he was an old hand at it, as though he had been debating all his life, as though he had been trained by twenty years of service in the Cabinet, in the House, or in the Senate. As though Lincoln had not done enough damage to Douglas and his cause, he points out Douglas' recklessness of utterances, his inaccuracy in stating facts, both as to the Kane County resolutions and as to the treatment of Senator Chase attempting to amend the Kansas-Nebraska Bill when it was under discussion in the Senate. Here, for the second time, we see that by Lincoln's splendid strategy Douglas is forced to fill up his hour and a half first with Lincoln's four questions, and then commenting upon and criticising Lincoln's method of replying and Lincoln's replies to the seven Ottawa questions. Here he did not follow Lincoln's method of studying the questions and carefully preparing replies, for this is not the method or manner of the brilliant Douglas. He evidently feared the comment of the papers or of the hearers in the audience—that he was not prepared to answer Lincoln's questions promptly, and he made a great point of Lincoln's failure to answer promptly

or that he feared to answer them now and wait till the next debate, especially as the debate at Jonesboro was almost three weeks off. The stars in their very courses seemed to be fighting for Lincoln.

Douglas, it was clear, must answer now or never; and he proceeds to answer, particularly the fateful second question—"Can the people of a United States Territory, in any lawful way, against the wish of any citizen of the United States, exclude slavery from its limits prior to the formation of a State constitution?"—a question loaded with sufficient explosives to blow to eternity not only all of Douglas' hopes and ambitions of a lifetime, but of the whole Democratic Party and slave power alike.

Douglas proceeds to answer, and does answer, with a sneer and a bravado such as no other man under similar circumstances could assume, as follows:

"I answer emphatically, as Mr. Lincoln has heard me answer a hundred times from every stump in Illinois, that in my opinion the people of a Territory can, by lawful means, exclude slavery from their limits prior to the formation of a State constitution. * * * It matters not what way the Supreme Court may hereafter decide as to the abstract question whether slavery may or may not go into a Territory under the Constitution, the people have the lawful means to introduce or exclude it as they please, for the reason that slavery cannot exist a day or an hour anywhere, unless it is supported by local police regulations * * * established by the local legislature. * * * Hence no matter what the decision of the Supreme Court may be on the abstract question, still the right

of the people to make a Slave Territory or a Free Territory is perfect and complete under the Nebraska Bill."

Here he ignores the Dred Scott decision—the sheet anchor of the South and of the slave power—attempting to please Illinois and the North, but stabbing the entire South in its most vital parts. He must win the Senatorship, at least, or he is hopelessly eliminated for the next two years. He still had hope of pacifying the South by his marvelous personality, by his wonderful presence on the platform. He would re-establish himself as he had so often done before. Douglas could have adopted no other course, could have made no other answer and survive, and Lincoln knew all that. Douglas concludes by saying, "I hope Mr. Lincoln deems my answer satisfactory on that point." Ah, what pathos in that comment, what a strange fatality has begun to pursue him, the hitherto invincible "little giant."

Nothing that happened in Lincoln's uneventful life up to this moment, was more satisfactory to him than this answer. Lincoln was indeed satisfied. Here was the undisputed leader of, up to that time, an undivided and invincible party—committing political suicide in answering Lincoln's question—a question which Lincoln had been entreated by every leader of the Republican Party not to ask, even as they asked him to omit his "house divided" paragraph on a former occasion. The board of strategy beginning with Judd down to Medill were unanimous as to both propositions—they were looking for the Senatorship which the split of Douglas and his friends with the Buchanan administration made possible. Why throw it away for the sake of a phrase or a question? Lincoln,

however, did ask the now famous second question, and did use the "house divided" paragraph.

The first, answered by Douglas, destroyed Douglas. The second, when uttered, destroyed the slave power as it brought before the nation the spokesman, the leader, the guide, who understood more clearly than any other living American what was ailing the Union—and spoke in a tone and in a style and in a voice which clearly showed up this hateful institution which had been hiding its ugly head behind compromise and chicanery and political subterfuge from the day of the great Declaration to this very moment. This same problem almost literally killed and destroyed the great leaders of three generations and now it laid low the "little giant," one of the ablest and keenest minds in the arena of our national politics.

Yes, Lincoln had good reason to be satisfied with the answer thus wrung from the unwilling and proud Douglas. With the answers thus uttered to Lincoln's famous four questions, he launched into an onslaught upon Lincoln's answers. They were inadequate, they were insincere, they were avoiding the issue. He (Lincoln) actually says that he could not state what he would do about slave trade between the States, as he had had no opportunity to study the question, and hence could make no honest reply. Was ever a similar statement made by another candidate? Was not he, Douglas, ready to answer all questions? And on the spot? here ringing in his sarcasms about Lincoln's "spot resolutions." Why was Lincoln dodging?

And then, further infuriated with Lincoln's charges about the Kane County resolutions and Chase's proposed amendment to the Kansas-Nebraska Bill in the Senate—he prac-

tically used himself up during his hour and a half and did not add anything new to what he had said before. He found himself actually enmeshed in Lincoln's scheme of things. He, Douglas, actually closed the door to the Presidency, and there was Lincoln ready in his half hour to give him enough material to keep him busy at Jonesboro three weeks hence, as he was to open with an hour's talk after he had succeeded in trotting Lincoln down to Egypt, where he proposed to impale him upon the inconsistency of his statements in the North and in the South of Illinois. And all this happened in and during Douglas' address in Freeport.

In his half-hour reply in Freeport, Lincoln could well afford to be humorous and condescendingly good-natured. There was not much he had to fear from Douglas henceforth, and besides he calls to his aid the published speeches of the first debate and declines to waste time on repetition of answers which, in his opinion, he had adequately made. He rather gently reminds the judge that he has not answered his (Lincoln's) charges. He tells the judge:

"I have answered my questions fully and honestly. I cannot see how they can be answered more fully." But "will not the judge be a little more explicit about his speech in the Senate about the editor of the Washington Union?" For here Lincoln quotes the Judge's speech in the Senate of March 22, 1858, which he happens to have handy, and offers some of these pamphlets and clippings to Douglas, so that the reports of the second debate will re-enforce those of the first, with Lincoln clearly the victor and in such a position from which no human power can dislodge him. There is nothing Douglas can add to embarrass Lincoln in the remaining five debates.

He had already referred to Lincoln's record on the Mexican War and on the "Spot Resolutions." Douglas had shot his bolt and gained nothing. Lincoln had propounded his questions. The answers made by Douglas ruined his chances of ever receiving the support of the South, up to that time indispensable to Democratic success in all Presidential elections, especially the coming election of 1860.

It little matters what was said in the remaining debates. Douglas became more incensed with every succeeding session, using up his voice until in Alton it was worn to tatters, while Lincoln proceeded in the same manner as he began—unmoved by the excitement and the irritation of his angry opponent. Lincoln added something to his stature on each occasion. He began at Jonesboro to change the whole trend of the debate by taking Douglas at his word and readily coming to the defense of Lyman Trumbull, thus using up Douglas for another session. (Judah P. Benjamin charged Douglas with inconsistency and evasion in his debates with Lincoln—referred to his Jonesboro address as "nonsense" and Douglas expected so much from his performance at Jonesboro.)

Lincoln rose to his greatest moral flight at Galesburg and concluded at Quincy and at Alton. By that time the whole country knew that a leader had arisen who knew more about the ailment of the Union than any other man, and he of all men was best qualified to bring about a solution and a cure. If you read and arrange every question and charge made by Douglas in all his addresses during the debates, you will find a complete reply or explanation by Lincoln of every important phase of the debate. Nothing remained to which Douglas could point as avoided or unanswered by Lincoln. You but

need examine Lincoln's notebook of the debates, as arranged by himself, pasting in the newspaper clippings and correcting them, and now in the possession of Oliver R. Barrett, and you can easily follow his method of juxtaposition of all material charges and replies, and of seeing that nothing of importance is neglected by him, and that every phase of the discussion is adequately set forth and explained.

And all this had its beginnings years before the joint debates. Lincoln had wrestled with this problem in the watches of the nights for twenty years. But the campaign for its final decision began and became possible at Freeport, Illinois, on August 27, 1858, the moment Douglas made answer to Lincoln's second question, and concluded with the hope that "Mr. Lincoln deems my answer satisfactory." Lincoln did deem it satisfactory. Lincoln's friends did not, and plainly said so. Anyone could have foreseen, said they, the reply Douglas was forced to make to attain the re-election to the Senate. And Lincoln would have no one to blame but himself if he was beaten. If Lincoln made any reply at all to these warnings and criticisms, he must have made the answer attributed to him, that his eyes were upon the campaign of 1860: "I am after bigger game. The battle of 1860 is worth a hundred of this."

This, as all other momentous decisions in his life, was made by Lincoln alone, uninfluenced by other minds or other men. He, and he alone, assumed the responsibility. Had he not asked the question and had he not thus disqualified Douglas for 1860—Lincoln might have been elected United States Senator—a not altogether foregone conclusion. But had he been so elected, in 1860, during the convention which

sought a nominee for the Presidency, he would have been in the Senate during those momentous two years preceding, 1859 and 1860, when the Senate destroyed more reputations, ended more careers, than any previous session of that body, and the Senate has been known as the graveyard of many an ambitious statesman throughout its entire history. Senators do talk and will talk, with nothing to stop them, very frequently talking too much. Lincoln's honesty and outspokenness alone would have supplied insuperable handicaps to his candidacy, for Lincoln would not have been a silent Senator. He certainly was not a silent Congressman during his one term in the House. So Douglas returned to the Senate, a discredited man, immediately supplanted on that most important Senate Committee on Territories by Jefferson Davis, up to that time his staunch follower, and he was to hear more and more about his apostacy to the platform of the slave power during the two years which followed.

Senator Benjamin of Louisiana, one of the great lawyers and statesmen of the day, often called "the brains of the Confederacy," pronounced the final judgment upon him in the following manner, referring more especially to Lincoln's declarations at Freeport in reply to the questions asked by Douglas, regarding his position on the slavery question:

"In that contest, the candidates for the Senate * * * went before the people. They agreed to discuss the issues, they put questions to each other, for answer, and I must say here, for I must be just to all, that I have been surprised in the examination that I have made of this discussion between Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Douglas * * * to find that Mr. Lincoln is a far more conservative man * * * than I had supposed him

to be. There was no dodging on his part. It is impossible not to admire the perfect candor and frankness with which his answers are given—no equivocation, no evasion.”

How far he had lost his hold with the Southern leaders is evidenced by this excoriation by Benjamin:

“I have been obliged to pluck down my idol from his place on high, and to refuse him any more support or confidence as a member of the Democratic Party. His adversary stood upon principle and was beaten, and lo! he is a candidate of a mighty party for the Presidency of the United States. One stood on principle—was defeated. Today, where stands he? The other faltered—received the prize, but today where stands he? He is a fallen star; we have separated from him.”

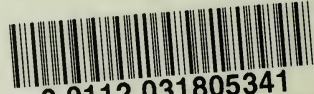
The Freeport debate therefore remains the high water mark of the struggle between slavery and freedom, between right and wrong, with the remaining debates as a commentary of and upon the doctrines of Abraham Lincoln which led him, after a dull and dreary life of preparation, into the place of power when he could re-cement and preserve what the founders had called into being.

How unfair, therefore, for anyone to transform an anniversary of this kind, at the very point and on the very spot where the miracle of the ages was enacted which preserved our great heritage, and tolerate that any other minor and comparatively unimportant issue should be raised in order to confuse or begot or obscure, even for the moment, the great work which Lincoln wrought here. How unfair for anyone to dissipate even for a moment, the great traditions which belong here, to interrupt the recital of the deeds of Lincoln

on this sacred spot, by something that is as fleeting as the wind and as unimportant in this day as were the unimportant causes which kept the leaders of his day at odds, while the national home and the Constitution itself were ablaze.

Freeport owes too much to Lincoln to honor another man or celebrate another event on this momentous day—hear such men during the remaining days of the year. Lincoln made its name immortal even as did the Magna Charta-Runymede; and Luther, the portals of the Church at Augsburg; and the Declaration of Independence, Independence Hall in Philadelphia. Let, therefore, on each succeeding anniversary, the people of Freeport gather and repeat the story of the great debate within its borders, on whose wings you ascended to glory. Let Lincoln lovers and students and authors gather from every corner of this land and speak and write the epic which had its rise on this hallowed spot, and let no spurious Lincoln be permitted to distract the thoughts of your fellow-countrymen from the great event which transpired here, and from that great form, which first became visible here, to the gaze of an expectant nation watching and praying for a leader in the hour of her great adversity. Your children must hear that unvarnished tale from the patriarchs who heard him here, “who were here in 1858”—call the roll, let each one answer, to the end that they may carry the torch unextinguished to the goal, and transmit the torch still burning to those who follow, in order to insure for all time that “under God” Lincoln’s government of the people shall not fail and shall endure forever.

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HOW ABRAHAM LINCOLN IMMORTALIZED THE FRE



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